your good buddy lily

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your good buddy lily

by larry_larson

Summary

of all things, hayden doesn't expect a t-shirt to be the thing that exposes it all

Notes

ive already watched episode four twice i'm actually going fucking insane,, i have not proofread this at all. it is almost three am. i couldn't sleep until this was done

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hayden, really, doesn't understand why Shane is so dodgy and weird about the fact that he's been hooking up with Lily for literally as long as Hayden has known him. Listen, Hayden's not, like, the most perceptive of the bunch, but he knows sure as fucking hell that Shane has a *thing* for Lily that isn't going away any time soon.

It started back in, like, 2010 probably. Hayden was new to the Metros, just as Shane was recently knighted Rookie of the Year. Impressive, yeah, and something that Hayden definetely wished that he had the opportunity to cinch a year prior when *he* was a rookie over in Tampa Bay. TB didn't really want to keep Hayden around for long, so they didn't hesitate when they traded both him and their top draft pick for some insane defenseman that turned out to be a massive disappointment.

In a way, it was Hayden's trade to Montreal that allowed them the chance to pick Shane first in the second overall draft pick. Second, of course, to the Royal Prince of Assholes himself, Ilya Rozanov.

It worked out great. Hayden has a best friend, a wife that he met at some charity dinner in downtown Montreal, and a successful career that's made him a happy player, happy husband, and happy father to his three adorable menaces. Soon to be four.

Wow.

Hayden should probably start up some college funds or something, right? That's what fathers usually do for their kids? Ruby and Emma aren't too young for a college fund, right? How about Arthur? What about Pike Baby Number Four?

Damn. Hayden should probably get some flowers for Jackie when he has the chance to go back home. For now, he'll settle by stopping by that Boston chocolatier that Jackie always craves when she's pregnant. Hayden doesn't understand how some Boston chocolate is any better than solid Canadian chocolate, but he isn't about to go threatening the wrath of his wife, especially when she's so pretty and terrifying when

carrying their child.

Hayden slides on his shoes and heads out the hotel door. Shane probably won't be back until later. He never seems to stay the night at Lily's place, which Hayden wants to think is suspicious, but Hayden literally does not want to get super involved with that. Shane might be fucking a married woman, and like, that *really* sucks, especially if he's outed for it, but Shane also plays like a fucking beast whenever he gets back from Lily's. Maybe she has some sort of magic sex move that appeals to the hockey gods and awakens something deep within Shane. Maybe it's, like, the stress or something, but that guy is literally always stressed so Hayden doubts that he's benefiting at all from some sort of adrenaline infused one-night-stand.

There's something about Lily.

And it's so good that it's turned golden boy Shane Hollander into somebody that keeps going back.

Hayden makes the walk down the street to the little mall that seems to really be just a glorified cafeteria. As he comes upon a toddler and baby store, he slows to look at the different learning toys stacked so neatly in the windows. One of which is a little letter tray that Hayden's definitely played with his girls at some time before. They always love spelling words out of letters, then swapping those letters around to make new words. They're really quite good at it, and Hayden's always a bit teary with pride as Emma rearranges the word *net* to be *ten.* Ruby and Emma are going to be geniuses. They're going to fix cancer and make world peace or whatever problem it is that needs solving now.

Looking forward to seeing his little family when he gets back from his road trip, Hayden continues towards the chocolate shop with a little smile on his face.

He pointedly ignores the *Sexy Suave Shane Hollander Cologne* commercials on the little advertisement televisions because he's seen enough of his best friend in his underwear in locker rooms and in hotel rooms. He doesn't want to look at that shit in public.

He's also, like, moderately-to-definitely annoyed that Shane's successful publicity career has made him more recognizable than Hayden. To be fair, Shane's a half-Asian captain of a back-to-back Stanley Cup winning team with a couple dozen brand endorsements under his belt. Hayden's just the alternate captain family man who

looks like pretty much every other white dude on the team. Hayden loves his life. He loves his wife and his daughters and his son. He loves his big house and his friendly team and his best friend who he doesn't know what he'd do without. Hayden's very happy with his life.

He just wishes that people could *see* how happy he is.

But no reporter wants to get the scoop on boring old Hayden Pike having his fourth kid with the same woman. Nobody wants a guy with no scandals.

The biggest mark on Hayden's record is just a foul mouth that happens to let a few too many f-bombs slip. Usually on the ice or in locker rooms, Hayden's not used to watching his language or tone, but now that both Shane and Jackie have teamed up on him, he should probably reign it in at some point.

Hayden buys Jackie a few extra chocolates... and then makes an order to have a shipment sent to his house here in about a month or so. If he knows Jackie, then her cravings will probably be the worst then. Hayden won't be able to be home with her, so the least he could do is at least ensure that she has as many of her favorite snacks as she wants. Look at that. Hayden's doing great. Husband of the year. Maybe even the decade, really.

He made sure to buy a few extras for himself as he walks back to his apartment, breathing in the comfortable evening air. They have an afternoon game tomorrow, so there's no morning practice. He can take a walk or go to a cafe or maybe just sit out in the open and see if anybody clocks his ass and finally asks him *'hey, are you Hayden Pike?'* To then Hayden will say abso-fucking-lutely and then take a few pictures and then he'll have his own little following just like how Shane somehow managed to scrounge up a hoard of mostly teenage girls pining after his boring ass. Wait. That's mean. Hayden apologizes to the Shane in his brain.

Hayden takes the stairs up to his fourth floor hotel room, then promptly collapses onto his bed and breathes in the pleasant detergent of his pillow. This bed is a nice one. Hayden's going to have the sleep of his *life*.

But much earlier than usual, the door clicks at some point and in comes Shane.

Hayden rolls over just enough to look at Shane, still flushed and

looking about a hair away from a panic attack.

He's wearing a black t-shirt that's too big for his frame. Hayden's ninety-percent sure that he hasn't seen those sweatpants on Shane before.

"You okay, man?" Hayden checks the clock. "You haven't been out long."

"Yeah, uh. Decided to come back."

Hayden blinks. "I can see that." He blinks again. The shirt is still black and it's still a size too large. "Did you have fun with... *Lily?"* He says the name slowly, as if to make sure he has it right. Lily's his Boston contact. That's who he sees every time he comes over here. That's who he fawns over his phone smiling at during every minute of downtime that the Metros have.

"Yep. Lily." Shane says sharply before he turns to his open suitcase to rifle through trying to find his game day suit.

"I hung it up in the closet," Hayden inputs, drawing Shane away from his frantic shuffle with a point to their shared wardrobe. "I don't know how to iron it, so sorry if there's still wrinkles." There are wrinkles everywhere in Shane's black shirt. Hayden has *definitely* never seen that shirt before.

"Oh. Thanks." Shane then hustles to the closet, first removing the ironing board and iron, before then grabbing his suit from the hangar.

Hayden decides that he should probably give Shane a bit of space to cool down from whatever the fuck terrible interaction he had with Lily and stands from the bed. He grabs some pajamas and walks into the bathroom. Maybe by the time he's done with his shower, Shane will have calmed down.

As it turns out, Shane is still not calm, but Hayden's gotten used to sleeping when there's too much stress in the air. Something about raising twin girls would be enough to fuck with Hayden's circadian rhythm forever. Hayden turns his back to Shane's bed and shuts his eyes, trying not to listen to the godawful NHL highlights playing on low volume on their shared TV. Shane is sitting upright, ramrod straight against his backboard and Hayden has half the mind to walk over there and pull Shane's ankles to get the guy to actually fucking

lay down for once in his life.

Usually when he sees his buddy Lily, he's like a boneless glob of slime that smiles and nods and blushes at literally everything said remotely in his direction.

So either Shane didn't go and see Lily and got over her for once, or something absolutely terrible happened between the two of them.

Regardless, Hayden has a sneaking feeling about how they're going to play tomorrow.

In the morning, of course Shane is already awake and in the shower as Hayden rolls over to slam his fist over his alarm clock. He cracks open an eye to blearily check the time. Nine AM. Perfectly normal time for normal people. Shane's probably already been to the gym twice, eaten first and second breakfast, signed another brand deal, done a commercial, and somehow read an entire book on hockey.

Hayden sits up, yawns, and tosses his legs over the bed.

Of course, Shane's bed is already made with his suitcase is laying out and open on top of his bed.

Including the black shirt.

Hayden's sleepy curiosity overthrows his minimal self control, and he finds himself reaching right for the black t-shirt folded right on top of Shane's shit.

While the material is a normal cottony type thing, the smell is not. Something about it is familiar in the way that it usually follows Shane when he comes back from these hookups, but the smell is not *Shane.* It's probably Lily.

Hayden turns the shirt over in his hands, then fishes the tag out from underneath the collar.

Huh.

The tag's in Russian.

The water in the bathroom shuts off, and Hayden's wide awake as he scrambles to fold the shirt as perfectly as Shane and return it right to the top of the stack.

Hayden dives right back into bed the moment Shane exits the bathroom.

"You good?" Shane calls.

"Yup!" Hayden answers, muffled in the pillows.

A few hours later, Hayden is sitting in the fucking penalty box and is frankly about to lose his shit. He's a nice guy, yeah. He's a nice Canadian guy who has a cute little family and a baby on the way. He's the totally normal and ordinary alternate captain to the two-time, back-to-back Stanley Cup winning Montreal Metros. He's a good hockey player that can hold his own in the fucking Olympics and has been invited on multiple occasions to participate in the NHL all-stars and skills games to show off how cool of a player Hayden Pike knows he is.

He's totally normal and still screaming profanities at fucking Ilya fucking Rozanov the fucking bastard he fucking is. That's four fucking--five--dollars put right into the swear jar, and now Hayden should seriously consider negotiating an exception for hockey games, because he can't fucking hold his tongue when the Russian Brute threw the first fucking punch and Hayden just retaliated. Now they both have two minutes for roughing and Hayden wasn't even fucking responsible for it. Rozanov needs to get socked in the face. Maybe someone should just bite his dick right off and then throw it right back into his fucking smug face, and Hayden might as well be the guy to do it.

He shakes his head and grits his teeth after Rozanov shows no interest in arguing with him through four inches of puck-proof plexiglass.

The Metros are down by two with only seven minutes left of the third period to go. Shane hasn't scored once. Hell, not even an assist. Rozanov hasn't been playing well either and Hayden's almost pissed that they didn't decide to show up for the legendary Boston and Montreal rivalry. This is supposed to be *good.* This is the fucking event that people wait all season to go see and none of the captains wanted to show up and give the people the show they paid for? What a load of bullshit. And now, Hayden doesn't even get to go out on the power play because the refs thought it was a grand fucking idea to ice both him and Rozanov after it was *Rozanov* that caused all of these fucking problems.

What an *asshole.*

Hayden can't wait to kick his ass again.

He shakes his head again. He probably shouldn't have taken those smelling salts before taking to the ice. Who fucking knows what Royce puts in those. Probably some sort of rage stimulant and that's why Hayden's making all of these bad choices and why Hollander's sloppy and Rozanov is extra fucking annoying.

When his penalty is finally over, Hayden takes back to the ice like a bullet, but he's not fast enough to fix their offense and get them any more ground to tie up the game.

Boston fucking wins.

Hayden slides up to do the customary line of handshakes. *Good game, good game, good game, good game--*

He mutters like a fucking robot until he reaches the end of the row where Rozanov awaits. He doesn't even have his signature smug smile.

He looks *gutted.*

He shouldn't look *gutted.* Hayden's the one who fucking lost! Rozanov should be laughing in their faces and the fact that he's not is just insulting at this point--

Hayden stiffens as Rozanov passes, then turns sharply around on his skates to ensure that he's getting this correctly.

A smell.

Familiar.

Too fucking familiar.

Right behind him in the line, Shane's also turned around, watching the man go.

Hayden's brain stutters then rumbles at it puts the pieces together.

He hopes his daughters would be proud as he reorganizes *Ilya* right into *Lily*.

"Oh man," Hayden whispers, eyes landing on the back of his best friend's helmet. *"Fuck."*

He can't even bring himself to care about his fucking swear jar, not as Shane's eyes follow Rozanov as he disappears into the home team's tunnel.

Shane.

What have you done?

Chapter End Notes

just wait for my next fic which is going to be the club scene BUT WITH THE ADDITION OF SASHA EHEHEHEHEHE

as always!! if you enjoyed please consider leaving me a comment!! they keep me fed and writing more fics for this insane show ehehehe <3

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> YOU GUYS ARE RABID /POS
> never before have i had such an immediate and positive reaction to a fic <3 this truly does mean the world omg
> SO!!! enjoy a second chapter! episode 5 releases in like,,,, five hours omg omg omg,,, have this little interlude!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Love, come to bed. You've been pacing for an hour." Jackie stands at the top of their baby-proofed stairs with her hands on her hips and long hair pulled up into the sloppiest bun Hayden has seen in his life. The shirt she's wearing has spit-up from their first borns stained on the front, and Hayden's positive that the pajama pants she's wearing are his. She's never looked more beautiful, even with the dark bags underneath her soft eyes.

"Sorry," Hayden mutters as he shakes himself from his admiration. Sure enough, there's a path stepped into the fluffy rug in the living room. It circles around the back of the couch to between the loveseat and the coffee table then back around again. The sun's gone down and the ESPN broadcast of the latest NHL game ended... *forever* ago. Who was playing? Was it the Fury? Philadelphia Fury and the San Fransisco Hammerheads, right? Hayden blinks, checking his surroundings once more before he looks back up to his wife. She has not moved, but she does yawn.

"Come on up," Jackie pleads gently, and it's not like Hayden can deny her anything for long.

He's been on the road for so long. The time that he gets at home in Montreal is so few and far between, and Hayden's hit with the horrible crushing guilt that comes with the realization that he's been wasting so much precious time.

"Sorry," he says again as he pauses in the kitchen to fill a glass of water. He probably won't need it, but Jackie usually gets dehydrated during the night. "I guess I lost track of time."

His socked feet race up the stairs, dodging all sorts of toys that their girls threw down at some point during the day. Hayden slows as he

nears the top where his beautiful wife is waiting. His gorgeous queen in the tower. She has a piece of a Cheerio in her hair, and really Hayden doesn't want to question how it got there. Anything is possible with their kids. Hayden's eyes tilt down to Jackie's stomach, still flat, though Hayden has a feeling that she'll start to show signs of their fourth child any day now.

Hayden's mouth goes dry at the thought of it.

Four.

He's going to have another kid.

He hands his wife her glass of water, then gently places a hand on the small of her back to lead her to their master bedroom. "Get tucked in, okay?" Hayden says as he kisses her forehead. "I'm gonna check on the kids. I'll be right back."

"Hurry up," Jackie says sleepily. "I miss you."

Hayden's heart breaks, physical pain lacing through his rib cage as he's reminded of exactly how much his wife has to do alone while he's out putting his body on the line for a game he loves and a paycheck that kills. It's a dangerous trade-off, but it won't be forever. He's already twenty-six. He's practically halfway through his career anyways.

Jackie makes herself comfortable on the left side of the bed. That's Hayden's side of the bed, but he doesn't care if Jackie wants it. She wraps her arms around Hayden's pillow and buries her nose into the soft cotton case. It probably still smells like him, a mix of the rink and shampoo and the bit of cologne that he occasionally uses when he wants to disguise the fact that he's a hockey player.

Hayden has to pull himself from the domestic scene of his wife getting comfortable in his pants and on his side of the bed. The first room he checks is Arthur's. First, he ensures the baby monitor is on and working, then leans over the edge of the crib to give his son a gentle kiss on the forehead. He sleeps soundly through the affection, made warm by the baby pink blanket tucked around him and the polka dot pajamas that match the little mural painted onto the nursery wall. The next room he tends to is Ruby and Emma's, made to look like a little rain forest due to their mutual obsession with animals. Hayden's already taken them to the zoo, to the aviary, and now the aquarium, and yet their curiosity is not satiated. He just wishes he didn't have to watch every National Geographic documentary himself to make sure

none of the cute animals get killed and make his daughters cry.

They both seem to be fast asleep in their respective twin beds, blissfully unaware of their father's turmoil. Has Jackie told them they're going to have another baby in the family? Well, they'd probably ask when they'd get here, and if Hayden's math is correct, then Jackie should be giving birth sometime at the beginning of the summer.

Theoretically, if Hayden were to miss playoffs, then he'd have a chance of finally being there for the birth of one of his children.

He wished he could've been there for Ruby and Emma, but Hayden was trapped in Seattle with horrific weather barring every flight even remotely in the direction on Montreal. Then it was Arthur's birth, and Hayden was in the hospital himself after taking a brutal puck to the head and it knocked him out cold right in the first period against the Pittsburgh Paladins. Hayden doesn't remember any of that happening, actually, but if the highlight reels are correct, then it was truly an embarrassing way to go down, no matter what his teammates try to say otherwise.

Hayden could throw playoffs to make the birth of his next child, but that in itself feels like a betrayal to himself.

Hayden's always been as honest of a man as he could ever be. He's lied before, yes, but never about anything grand. He is nothing short of an open book who wants the best for his family, both on and off the ice.

Doing *anything* to threaten the Metros's chance of making playoffs is a betrayal in its entirety.

Which is part of the reason why he can't sleep as he returns to his bedroom after kissing both of his girls goodnight. He peels back the covers and slides in right behind Jackie. She pushes her back into his torso, humming pleasantly at the warm contact. Hayden kisses the back of her neck gently, and uses his free hand to card his fingers through her scalp in the way that Hayden knows she loves it. She's a puddle by the time he ceases his little massage, already on the verge of falling asleep.

Her soft snores fill the gentle air around them, and Hayden still can't sleep.

Every time he closes his eyes, he's met with a Russian smirk and the glaring number *81* disappearing into the tunnel.

It hasn't even been forty-eight hours since the Metros lost to Boston. Hayden didn't speak to Shane in the locker room, and put in his earbuds on the flight home so he didn't have to try and risk awkward conversation. He didn't linger in the airport and called a cab to take him back to the high-end neighborhood where his family waits. Shane didn't seem too interested in conversation either, which Hayden supposes is a small blessing, but something ugly deep inside his chest wishes that Shane would start talking so Hayden would have an excuse to lean in and push right on the bruise.

He swallows thickly and holds Jackie close.

Nausea tastes bitter in the back of Hayden's throat as he imagines his best friend just like this, wrapped in the arms of their enemy. The one who's threatened everything they've ever worked for. The man who Hayden takes every chance to fight, to put into place, to order him to go back home where they'd actually like him for once.

And Shane goes running into his arms whenever they wind up in the same city.

Shane. Hayden shuts his eyes tight. *Why did you have to do it?*

Hayden, expectedly, does not get much sleep that night. Really, he doesn't even remember falling asleep, but he's half conscious when the sun begins to rise and already blearily awake by the time his alarm trills and he rolls over to silence it. Jackie, somehow, sleeps like the dead and doesn't even rouse as Hayden carefully separates himself from her and, after pulling on some socks, makes his way downstairs.

This sort of peace never lasts for long, so he takes advantage of what time he has. The first thing to get going is the blueberry pancake batter that comes from a box, because Hayden wears many hats, but a chef's is not one of them. As the mixer works, he drops some bacon into a hot pan and savors the sizzle. Next, Hayden cracks some eggs into a bowl as he waits for Arthur's cries to stream through the baby monitor or for the giggles of his daughters race down the stairs with their bare feet. Hayden divides the eggs into two batches, seasons one bowl how he knows Jackie likes them, and then makes the other plain and fluffy for Ruby and Emma.

He's a domestic man. After spending half the year away from Montreal slamming men twice his side into the boards, Hayden would do anything to be at home as often as possible. He keeps his fridge stocked with Jackie's favorite fruit mocktails, Emma's Capri-Suns, and Ruby's apple juice. He looks forward to warming Arthur's bottles and cradling his son as he feeds. He'll sit on the floor for hours until his back hurts with his daughters, playing word games and quizzing them until they're nothing but a giggling heap. Those nights where Hayden can cuddle up to Jackie on the couch with their kids draped around them while some painfully on-the-nose kid's movie plays on their large flat screen are more important to him than any sort of playoff win.

If he had to give up the Cup for his family, he would.

He just knows that his family would never put him in that situation.

He starts the coffee pot and removes the eggs from the heat about the same time that Arthur's fussing crackles in from over the monitor. Hayden's up the stairs in a heartbeat, nudging open Arthur's door to scoop his son into his arms before his fussing turns into cries and wakes Jackie from her rest. Hayden bounces Arthur gently against his chest before laying the baby down on the changing table to quickly get him ready for the day. Hayden even dresses the kid in a pair of pants and a shirt. Look at that! They even match, too.

Hayden will take Arthur downstairs with him, for he's looking forward to having just a dash of father-son time before the rest of the house awakens. Last Hayden remembered, Arthur was wearing 9M clothes, and now he's been upgraded to 1Y. His baby boy is pink and round in the cheeks. He's blinking with some authority now, and Hayden just knows he's going to wallow in misery when he misses Arthur's first words because he's in St. Louis or some shit.

Carefully, Hayden straps Arthur to his chest using the baby sling that Jackie showed him how to use when their daughters were Arthur's size. Now, his girls have to be at least five years old. What year is it? 2016? That sounds... vaguely correct.

Shaking his head, Hayden leaves Arthur's room and quietly descends the stairs. Toys leftover from Ruby and Emma's playtime pose dangerous tripping hazards, but Hayden isn't considered one of the most skilled skaters in the NHL for nothing. He's quite talented with socks and hardwood. They tend to function roughly the same.

Hayden bounces Arthur gently as he warms his son a bottle of

prepared milk.

For a few minutes, it's just the two of them. *The boys.*

Boy. Yeah, that's always felt far more accurate than *man.* Hayden still can't grow a fucking beard. He's twenty-six and looks like he's still a rookie fluctuating between the AHL and the big leagues back in fucking *Tampa*. He has *three* kids and a fourth on the way. He's been married for longer than some of the frequently-divorced veterans. Yet, when Hayden looks in the mirror, he still feels like a kid.

"One of these days your balls will drop, Pike!" one of the veterans chirped while Hayden was strapping his pads around his shoulders. He had furrowed his brow, but quickly wiped his expression to an amused one, rolling his eyes and laughing along with the chortles of the other thirty-something year olds. *"Yeah! Maybe the nightmare of fatherhood might man you up a little!"*

That one had stung, but Hayden is still just a kid. He has that fucking A, but he was in high school when these guys were in their prime. He has their fucking posters still up in his childhood bedroom, located upstairs in an ordinary neighborhood nestled in the middle of his hometown outside Toronto.

"I don't think you're a nightmare," Hayden mutters as he presses a kiss to Arthur's head. His hair is nothing more than a few brownish wisps. He's probably going to look just like Hayden as he grows up. "The guys just like to talk shit in the locker room." *Hayden* just likes to talk shit in the locker room. He usually doesn't mean it. He's just trying to get a reaction out of a teammate or opponent. He's just trying to use his *A* to his advantage and get some energy sizzling through the room before they take to the ice to vent their frustrations against anyone wearing a different colored jersey.

However, there are some insults that he truly means. He'll spit them from the depths of his soul and won't back down even when it seems injury is looking him right in the eye.

As Hayden butters the last few pancakes, a gentle cadence of footsteps coming down the stairs cause him to look up. Jackie's still in Hayden's pajamas, though she's redone her hair into a loose braid over her shoulder. She still looks sleepy, as it seems she always does nowadays, but there's a smile on her face as she meets Hayden in the kitchen with a soft kiss to his chapped lips.

"Good morning," he says, a little breathless.

"Morning," she murmurs, eyes fluttering shut as she leans in again and again, very careful of their child between them. "You're up early."

"Didn't sleep well," Hayden says honestly. "Thought I'd at least get us ready to rock and roll."

Jackie raises her brows. "Any plans for today?"

"Not really," Hayden answers with a shrug. "Just thought with the day off we could do something. Or if you wanted to stay home and just relax, that'd be fine too." His breath hitches as Jackie cradles his face between her soft hands. "You know," he says, barely above a whisper. "I'm easy."

Jackie brings his face down to kiss his nose before she's stepping away to the stove. Oh. Right. Hayden forgot about the second batch of bacon that he left on there. He knows his daughters go insane for bacon, and figured it would be smart to have some extra.

"You said you didn't sleep well," Jackie says as she pats the bacon down with a paper towel. "Is your knee bothering you again? Because I told you to do your stretches yesterday--"

"I did my stretches, don't worry," Hayden answers quickly. He listens very closely to his physical trainer, perhaps the one person he'd never dare cross when it comes to his career. "I'm just..." he sighs. "I'm just worried about Shane."

"Shane?"

"Yeah..." Hayden pushes all the air out of his lungs with a sigh. "I think he got himself into some deep shit."

She sends him a look that says *swear jar,* but doesn't say anything about it. "Well, have you tried talking to him about it?"

Hayden pauses.

"Hayden."

"I mean... *no."* He grimaces. "It's not like we've really had a second to talk about it. And then what the hell would I even say?" He gestures and then remembers he has his son strapped to his chest and then is much more responsible with his movements. "Like, *hey buddy! Best pal in the whole wide world! Why the hell did you think it was a good idea to fuck our arch nemesis behind our backs?"*

Jackie's eyes go wide.

Fuck.

"I wasn't supposed to tell you that," Hayden immediately tries for some damage control. "Jackie, you can't tell anyone."

"Back up, back up--" Jackie holds up her hand, then takes a very long drink of her coffee. Hayden grabs his own coffee and holds it in front of his face for support. Arthur's little chubby hands reach for the warm mug, so Hayden raises it higher to cover his face entirely. "Shane is having an affair with..."

"Ilyarozanov."

"Hayden."

He drains half the mug before setting it down on the counter with a sigh. "Ilya Rozanov."

"Shane Hollander, golden boy of hockey, is having an affair with the most divisive player in the league?" Jackie looks like she doesn't believe it. Hayden doesn't blame her. "How do you know this? Do you know how insane this sounds?"

"I don't want to believe it either... it's just..." Hayden rubs at his brow. "There's enough fucking evidence to prove it."

"As in?"

"Shane only meets up with this *Lily* he's been talking to for, like, a decade when they're in Boston. I have *never* seen Shane with a girl in my life. I always thought that he could be gay, which like, isn't an issue at all because I'm not a fucking douchebag, but it's an issue when he's been *fucking* our *opponent."* Hayden shuts his eyes tight, trying to ward away his brewing headache. "And yesterday, Shane came back to our hotel room early. He didn't even spend the night at *'Lily's'* house. He came back looking like shit and wearing *men's clothes.* The tag of his t-shirt was in fucking Russian, Jackie." He shakes his head, leaning back on the counter. Arthur starts to fuss, so Hayden bounces the kid gently against his chest. "And you watched the game last night. Rozanov and Shane both played like shit. I think something happened with them." He waves his hand flippantly. "Their whole relationship or whatever."

Jackie hums, and doesn't say anything until she's finished her coffee.

"So is their relationship a good or a bad thing?"

"Bad." Hayden says instantly, no question about it.

Jackie raises a brow.

"I think," Hayden changes his mind.

"They play better after they fuck?" Jackie clarifies as she pours another mug.

"Yes," Hayden mutters.

"So what's the big issue with them being together?" Jackie asks, then crunches on a piece of bacon. "This is good. The girls are going to go crazy."

The thrill of the simple praise is short lived as Jackie's question settles in. "Jack... it's just... our whole team is caught up in this insane rivalry against Boston. People *show up* because they want the fights and the stakes and the good fucking hockey. We're supposed to hate each other. We *do* hate each other." God, what Hayden would give to absolutely punch Rozanov's lights out, especially after discovering that Rozanov could've fucked up Hayden's best friend beyond repair. "It's a betrayal."

Betrayal.

So simply said.

"It's like... I trusted my friend. I thought we were on the same team here." Hayden runs a hand through his hair, then stares at the ceiling for a long time to hide the burning behind his eyes. "It hurts." He swallows thickly. "It really fucking hurts."

Because Shane could be fucking up the best thing the both of them have going. Because Shane is with the enemy.

Because Shane didn't tell him.

Joyous shrieks from upstairs jolt Hayden out of his spiral. He runs a hand over his face, trying to wipe the emotion from it. He's only able to catch Jackie's eye for a moment before two little girls come barrelling down the stairs, chanting for bacon and pancakes.

Jackie reaches to gently pat Hayden on the forearm.

You'll be fine, her eyes say, but Hayden's not sure if he can believe her just yet.

Chapter End Notes

considering a chapter 3,,,, hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm it really depends on how episode 5 goes and if i'm inspired lmao thank you all so much for reading!! if you enjoyed, PLEASE consider leaving me a comment bc the power is out in my house and it is the middle of december and i am so cold and it is very dark

also i am going to be watching episode five with a very pretty girl tonight (if you're reading this i would like for you to kiss me please) and i know we're both into each other and jsut watiing for a move and HRNRNRNGNNGNGNN ilya rozanov hit me with some lesbian magic and confidence to make a move,,, i will be updating you all on if we kiss

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

currently finishing writing this while watching the flyers/hawks game,,,, i'm not even a hawks fan but i miss bedard,,,, i hope he's okay and taking his time with his injury he is literally 1 year older than me wow,,, flyers i hope you win bc you are my most specialest princesses <3 it okay if you don't win as long as jamie drysdale and TK have fun (ersson i hope you suffer btw)

due to high demand (and inspiration struck!) here is chapter 3!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Hayden found out that *his* best friend was dating *Rose Landry*, he was fucking ecstatic. Not only would Hayden then have access to the elite Hollywood parties and a chance to befriend these other A-list celebrities, it also means that unless his friend is a scumbag cheater--which Hayden is *fairly sure* Shane is not--Shane is no longer hooking up with Ilya Fucking Rozanov. Since Rose and Shane started "hanging out"--because *dating* is too strong of a term, apparently--Boston's also started playing like shit, which is entirely fucking epic because now Hayden doesn't have to worry about squaring up with their massive defensive pairs in order to get through the the Cup. That cup is going to be *theirs,* baby. Third year in a row. He's fucking counting on it.

It also heals his petty little soul to know that Rozanov is suffering. Just a little bit.

Good for Shane. He deserves Rose. Everything that Hayden has seen of her has been nothing but positive. Sure, the action movies she's starred in are mostly subpar, but there was that one drama that Hayden couldn't even get through because he started sobbing halfway into the second act. Jackie, pregnant with Arthur at the time, wasn't too happy that Hayden paused and excused himself to the bathroom. When he emerged, he chalked it up to some sort of secondary pregnancy hormones, then Jackie offered him a bite of *her* ice cream and then they watched some sort of stupid kid's show that their daughters like. Hayden finished the movie about a month later in Boston when he was sitting alone in he and Shane's shared hotel room. *That* was a movie. Should've been Oscar nominated or some

shit. Honestly, it might've won an Oscar. Hayden doesn't really pay attention to that sort of thing.

Bottom line is, Hayden likes Rose a lot. She should stick around some more.

It also helps that she brings in an even larger crowd to every home game that she attends.

Hayden's packing for Tampa, not entirely thrilled to be going back to his rookie team that traded him and a handful of other prospects without even *blinking,* but thrilled to show up for the All Stars Game to annihilate the West Coast. Shane got picked as captain, which was entirely expected, but he wasn't quite expecting *Rozanov* to be the alternate. He was *maybe* expecting someone like Heath Valentine from DC or Walt Buchanan from Carolina because those guys are stand-up and relatively well-respected. They're also damn good at hockey.

But apparently not as good as Rozanov.

Which is fine. Hayden's fine. He's normal, actually. He's so fucking normal about this.

He wishes the kids could take off a bit of school to come with. He wishes Jackie didn't have her hands full. He wishes his best friend would hang out with him instead of Rose Landry, which is better than the alternative of Rozanov, but the alternative is not Hayden. It should be Hayden.

He's starting to get lonely on these road trips. He can only go out and party with J.J. so often, and it's not like he can stand to listen to Miitka for too long before it just becomes agonizing. Really, how much can one guy know about the US highway system and how long can he actually talk about it? So far, Miitka's gone for two hours uninterrupted, and the only reason why Hayden stuck around long enough to listen was because he was blitzed out of his mind at some random bar in Denver. Also, he didn't know how to get back to the hotel. Miitka was only one beer in, but he wouldn't help anyone back to the hotel until he was done with his rant.

Hayden retained absolutely zero of the information. The only thing he took away from that night at the bar was the fact that he doesn't want to learn about the US Highway system and he doesn't want to be around Miitka for too long outside of the rink. Goalies. Hayden will literally never understand them.

"That's probably enough clothes, right?" Hayden asks absolutely nobody as he assesses the contents of his half-open suitcase. Some shirts, some shorts, a pair of pants in case he totally read the Florida weather forecast wrong. Of course, ten pairs of socks and thirteen pairs of underwear in case he somehow manages to shit himself three times a day, and then an extra pair in case there's a fourth.

Sunglasses, he remembers with a snap of his fingers. *Oh,* also sunscreen. He has to protect his pasty skin somehow. He's from the Toronto suburbs after all, and the singular rookie season he spent with Tampa Bay before they got rid of his ass did nothing to acclimate him to warm weather and sun. Hayden enters his bathroom, pausing to give Jackie a kiss on the head from where she's lounging in the medium-warm bubble bath with a book in hand and a diet soda on the lip of the tub.

"Don't forget your toothbrush," Jackie reminds as she looks up from her book. Knowing her, it's probably something about fairies or knights or both. He'll ask her about it when she's done reading, and then maybe ask if there's a TV show based off it that they could watch together. "Or your retainer."

"I'm not going to forget my retainer, *Jackie,"* Hayden responds in a slightly teasing tone, snapping out the retainer that contains three fake teeth just for emphasis. Jackie giggles, her nose wrinkling as she turns back to her novel. Hayden would actually pry out all of his teeth--real *and* fake--if it means he can get her to laugh like that forever. As he packs up his various toiletries into his little toiletry bag (which is covered in a swirly flower pattern because fuck you that's why), he slides his retainer back into place, then uses his tongue to secure it. Mouth guards may do a lot in hockey, but they're not enough to tank a full hit from all three hundred pounds of Buffalo's Pierre Boudrou. Hayden has his real teeth somewhere. He picked those off the ice himself, no way was he just going to throw them away from some rat to have. Those are his fucking teeth. Maybe he should make a bracelet or something out of them. Use it as an intimidation tactic, maybe. That would be sick.

Within the hour, Hayden's packed up his carry-on suitcase for his four-day jaunt in Tampa Bay, Florida. Jackie's a bit pruney, but out of the tub and wrapped in her most favorite fluffy bathrobe that Hayden got her their first anniversary together. He's secures a baseball cap over his hair and kisses his wife long and deep, saddened that he'll be away from her for the rest of the week, but thrilled to be invited to the All Stars game as a forward.

After he kisses Jackie, he stoops to kiss her stomach, which is already showing with the smallest curve she and Hayden's fourth and final child. They've already agreed that four will be plenty, and then during the off-season, Hayden will get a vasectomy and Jackie will look into getting her reproductive system taken care of. Hayden's not too familiar with that side of things. He just knows that for whatever fucking reason it's so much more annoying and complicated to get anything done.

He kisses Ruby and Emma goodbye, then kisses the top of Arthur's sleeping head. The poor kid has been crashed off of a sugar high, for just twelve hours ago they were prematurely celebrating Arthur's first birthday. He won't be one until Friday, but Hayden will be all the way in Florida instead of home in Montreal. It's okay. Arthur won't remember this anyways, and nobody's going to criticize their scrapbook for having a celebration a few days early.

Soon enough, Hayden's meeting Shane at the airport with a massive smile. Shane looks a bit... more *relaxed*, which is good. The guy somehow always needs to be more relaxed. If anyone were to be as stiff as Shane Hollander, they would snap in half like a brittle toothpick.

They sit on the plane to Tampa together, conversation clear of any sort of indication of Shane's love life, and really mostly focused on baby names for Hayden's fourth kid.

Their coach, the head coach for the Pittsburgh Paladins, basically just tells them to do their best out there. Have fun, be showy, hype up the crowd. Basically all the showmanship that they usually don't like to tolerate during the regulation season. This is the *All Stars* game. This is the chance that they have to get a little crazy with it and not have to worry about their win-loss ratio.

Usually, Hayden would be thrilled to be a part of such an event that brought in the likes of Scott Hunter, Carter Vaughn, and *Shane Hollander,* except for the fucking fact that Hayden's been moved from first line to third.

Want to know who took his spot as right wing to Shane Hollander's center?

Ilya Fucking Rozanov.

So *yeah,* Hayden's a little more than pissed.

He can play third line fine. That's what he played when he was a rookie. His second year, he was moved up to second to try things out, and the coaches quickly found that he and Shane had an on-ice chemistry unlike any they had seen from Montreal in a long while. By the end of November, Shane and Hayden had become the leading goal scoring and assist duo in the entire league. Hayden couldn't qualify for any of the rookie awards, but he was more than happy to be at Shane's side as he accepted everything thrown his way. Hayden smiles, he claps, he shakes the hands, and then takes the selfies. He loves Shane, really, always more than happy to support him with everything and anything.

Well...

As Hayden watches the way Rozanov leans into Shane's ear during the team huddle before practice, he supposes he can't quite support Shane in everything.

Hayden wants to break his stick in half.

Three nights later, at the main event that the entire hockey world had been waiting for, Ilya Rozanov kisses Shane Hollander's cheek. The world cheers. Hayden's stomach drops out from underneath him, powerless to do anything from where he's trapped with the rest of the third line on the bench. When the west coast captain, Billy Grant Radley, knocks Hayden right onto his ass after a clean check against the boards, the ice has never felt so cold.

So Boston Lily's been calling again, and, like, actually calling and not texting.

Hayden doesn't exactly know how to feel about this, especially since Shane just nabs his phone, utters some half-assed excuse, and

disappears through their hotel door. They're not even *in* Boston. They're literally in Vancouver and Rozanov's been shipped back to Russia on some personal emergency. What time is it in Russia? Knowing Rozanov, it's probably jack-off o'clock and he needs Shane there to help him get off or some shit and Hayden should really stop thinking about this otherwise he's going to make himself a little too sick.

Since she's entering her third trimester, Hayden busies himself with texting Jackie, asking her to tell him everything and anything that she might need. While Vancouver may not have Boston chocolates, they might have some *Vancouver* chocolates that are somehow leagues better than the Boston chocolate his wife craves whenever she's pregnant. At least Vancouver is Canadian. There's a relation there, unlike Boston and all of its horrible, terrible misgivings.

The Vancouver White Whales are hardly a team to be worried about, and the hysterical theory is that their captain is currently being haunted by ghosts of hockey past ever since he decided to sell his soul.

So, when they take to the ice the next afternoon, Hayden's expecting for the Metros to absolutely wipe the floor with the Whales, but they only win by a point, and it was tied until the third period. After handshakes and making their way back into the locker room, Hayden shoots Shane a look, but his friend has his nose in his phone, certainly texting a certain Boston Lily.

"Spilling team secrets?" Hayden asks as Shane joins him at the bench. He glances up to the clock, watching as the minutes of their warm-up tick down and the crowds filter in for the highly anticipated rivalry match between Montreal and Boston.

"Hm?" Shane has the audacity to look confused before he reaches for his water bottle. "Oh, uh, no. I was just offering my condolences."

"Shit," Hayden hisses. The man's father just fucking died. As much as Hayden hates the guy and everything that he represents, losing a parent sucks. He doesn't even want to think about the day that he'll

die and leave his four kids without a dad, but as much as it would suck, Hayden would die before any of them in a heartbeat. Hayden shakes his head back to the present with a sigh. "Right. Man, I should've done that." He glances back over to Rozanov, who's lazily skating to his teammates in the middle of their defensive zone. "What did he say?"

"Just told me to fuck off," Shane answers quickly with a shrug. *Too quickly.* Hayden narrows his eyes.

"What an *asshole,"* Hayden mutters with emphasis.

"He's not too bad. It's mostly just an act." Shane's not meeting his eyes, which isn't exactly anything new, but he's *intentionally* averting his eyes, which clear-as-day clues Hayden into the fact that he's hiding some grand secret.

I'm sure. "Well, it's a hell of an act. Had me fooled." Or *maybe,* he just has you fooled, *Shane.*

"Yeah. Right," Shane says, though Hayden knows he wasn't listening. The last seconds of their warm-up period tick away as the team reconvenes at the bench. Of course, Hayden's going out with Shane and Heikkinen on their air-tight first line.

Hayden slides into place at the edge of the circle, crouching with his stick ready to scoop the puck out as soon as Shane knocks it between his legs. Easy goal. First minute. Put the Metros on the board and rely on Miitka and their defense to ensure that the Raiders don't get anywhere near the offensive zone and goal.

The ref lines them up.

Usually, Hayden could catch Shane's eye and nod. They have their plan, their trust, their system that *works.*

But Shane doesn't look at Hayden.

He's looking at fucking *Rozanov.*

Hayden forces himself to focus as the puck drops.

Shane loses the face-off, but Hayden's already accounted for that, skating around the Raider wing to a gap that allows for a breakaway right to the goal.

Shane's in the middle of the scramble, but so is Rozanov.

Hayden's eyes widen.

"Marleau!" he screams, but not fast enough for Shane to notice.

Shane's head cracks against the ice.

Hayden's ears roar.

"Marleau, you *motherfucker!"* Hayden's fists are bare as he throws the first punch. Marleau doesn't even have a moment to react before Hayden has his black jersey fisted in his open hand as he lays punch after punch into the motherfucking smug face of the man that just took his friend out.

Hayden spares a glance to Shane. He's not getting up.

He's not getting up.

Hayden's muscles freeze, weakened yet still like a vice around Marleau's jersey. They're both staring, Marleau's ungloved hand wrapped around Hayden's wrist as their leftover momentum causes them to gently skate away from the scene of the crime.

Rozanov hovers around the medics and the stretchers, eyes shining and lips parted as if he's halfway between saying something he'll regret or staying silent.

"Can you keep your eyes open for me, Shane?" one of the medics asks.

Concussion, Hayden's mind supplies in an instant. *He has a concussion.*

They have to take Shane off the ice on a stretcher.

And Hayden can only watch.

"I'm so sorry--" Marleau mutters, voice impossibly small from such a massive man who can cause such fucking destruction.

Hayden shoves him away, glowering at his fucking audacity. "You could've killed him--" Hayden hisses.

"It was an accident, I--"

I thought he would see me coming.

He should've.

Shane should've seen Marleau coming from across the fucking rink. Shane is the fastest fucking guy in the entire fucking NHL and the fact that Shane--*a captain* and back-to-back Stanley winner--didn't see one of the largest defensemen in the League coming right at him--

He was distracted.

Hayden scoffs, sneering as he skates back to the bench.

Rozanov's eyes haven't left the tunnel.

Hayden breaks his stick against the boards before the refs send him off to the penalty box.

Even after their 5-2 victory over Boston, Hayden is not happy. He's still fucking pissed. With their captain and Hayden's *best friend* out in the hospital with a broken collarbone and a concussion, that left Hayden to step up and be captain for the night. Being at Shane's side for the past years, Hayden's picked up a couple of his captain tactics. It was easy enough to get the team to listen to him, and after the end of their first period when it was tied zero-to-zero Hayden managed to unite his entire team with mixed rage and desperation.

Their captain's out for the playoffs.

That doesn't mean that they can't get out there and win the fucking cup for the third year in a row for him.

They moved Kolya up from the second line to the first, which Hayden didn't think would be a problem in the slightest. Kolya held his own, especially against Rozanov who played entirely like shit for the rest of the game.

Man up, Hayden wanted to hiss when he checked Rozanov against the boards and stole the puck right out from under him. *You're letting yourself lose because of what happened to Shane?*

A disgrace. Betrayal. Hayden wants to throw up and fight and then throw up again. He wants to call Jackie. He wants to hold his kids. He wants to go out drinking ginger ales at sports bars with Shane as they

both try to understand the rules of American Football.

It takes Hayden nearly all night with his coaches and social media representatives to issue a statement about Shane's condition and update the fans on whether or not that would affect their future playoff chances. By the time he was finally free of the rink and in his car on the way home, Hayden knew there would be no time to visit the hospital and see his best friend. He already texted Shane's parents, and they luckily let Hayden know that he was responsive and alright.

But Hayden knows he won't be able to relax until he sees Shane awake and alive himself.

Every time Hayden closes his eyes, he sees Marleau knocking Shane to the ground. He sees a blue heap atop shining white ice. He sees Rozanov hovering and on the verge of tears. He sees red on his own fists, blood drawn right from Marleau's lip as Hayden bashed it in.

"Hey, love," Jackie greets from the living room as soon as Hayden enters through the garage. He blinks, staring at the wall of family pictures in front of him and wondering how he got home when he doesn't remember anything from the drive. "There's some take-out in the fridge if you want it. You'd just have to heat it up in the oven."

Hayden's not hungry, so he skips the kitchen entirely as he meets Jackie in the living room with a kiss to her forehead. She's curled up on the couch, some trashy reality television show playing as white noise on the television. Due to the late hour, the kids must all be asleep. *Jackie* should be asleep, but here she is, waiting for Hayden on the living room couch when she and their unborn baby should be in bed and asleep already. It's past midnight already. If Shane was never hit, then Hayden would've been home hours ago.

Fucking Marleau.

Fucking *Rozanov*.

"Bed time," Hayden says, pulling on Jackie's blanket before offering her his hand.

"Do you wanna talk about the game?" she asks, accepting his hand and standing with a huff. She's nearly eight months pregnant now. Their daughter's probably going to be a playoffs baby, and Hayden had been worried that he was going to miss his fourth child's birth. Now, with Shane out of the playoffs without possible return until next season, Hayden has a bittersweet feeling that he's finally going to be in that

hospital room holding Jackie's hand.

"You saw it," Hayden says glumly, leading Jackie to the stairs up to their room.

"I haven't seen you that mad in a while," Jackie notes casually.

Hayden gnaws at the inside of his cheek, then helps Jackie slowly up the steps. "It's just..." He abandons his thought with a sigh. "You hate to see him get hurt." And Hayden sure as hell hates to see Shane hurt when it's Rozanov and his lackey Marleau's fault.

Hayden helps Jackie into her favorite pregnancy nightgown that looks like something straight out of the eighteen hundreds, and then changes into his own pajamas which look like they're from the twenty-first century. He hopes that tonight won't be a night where the smell of the rink soap makes Jackie sick, because Hayden really wants to sleep in his bed right now and taking a shower before crashing on the couch sounds like the worst way to spend the night after an already terrible game.

Sure, they won.

But Shane won't be back for months.

Their playoff chances aren't looking great.

Jackie rolls over onto her side, and Hayden slots naturally behind her after turning off all the lights. She's warmer than usual, which the doctors told Hayden was normal. It doesn't take long for her to become entirely relaxed, exhausted from the effort of her day.

"You didn't have to stay up to wait for me," Hayden mumbles into her hair. He runs a hand over her pregnant belly.

"I wanted to," she responds after a sleepy moment. "I knew you had a bad day."

Hayden nods, hoping that she can feel the movement to satisfy for an answer. Hayden stares at the wall adjacent to their bed until his eyes become fuzzy, and when he blinks tears fall from his eyes. He sniffles, then wipes his face on his pillow.

Jackie doesn't comment, and it takes a minute for Hayden to realize it's because she fell asleep.

Hayden should probably try to do that, but he knows that the dread that sits between his ribs won't allow him to rest so easily. He shuts his eyes a few times, then opens them to stare at the wall once more as the image of Shane prone and unmoving on the ice worms its way onto the backs of Hayden's eyelids.

In the morning, first thing, he'll go to the hospital. He has to see Shane with his own eyes.

They'll be okay.

Hayden, like usual, is awake before Jackie.

Sometime in the night, they had both moved enough to the point where Jackie's pillow is on the floor and she, at some point, managed to steal Hayden's from under his head. Hayden sits up, looking around their mess of a room. Jackie sleeps with, like, a million pillows when pregnant, and somehow she lost all of them and then stole Hayden's singular head pillow. He carefully slides out of bed, then gently stalks around the room to collect all of Jackie's pillows that were ejected from the bed during the night. While he's at it, Hayden finds himself picking up a few abandoned glasses of water, laundry from the floor, and then some of their daughters' toys that somehow found themselves in mom and dad's room.

Hayden takes his bounty downstairs to the kitchen, and then finds himself picking up the kitchen until the next step would be to actually *clean* and Hayden doesn't exactly want to wake everyone up at eight in the morning with some cleaning. After starting a pot of coffee, Hayden runs upstairs to change into some acceptable normal-people clothes, and doesn't have the motivation to do his hair, so he tucks an ordinary old Montreal baseball cap over it. He wears a helmet most of the time, anyways, so Hayden's not exactly worried about any sort of *fantastic fantabulous flowing hair* reputation.

He brushes his teeth, sends Jackie a text for her to catch in the morning, then plugs in her phone to make sure that she won't panic when she wakes up and finds Hayden gone. He'll be back before noon, and he'll even bring back McDonald's for them all. He knows his daughters are going rabid trying to get one particular Happy Meal toy. Maybe they'll finally have all their dreams come true.

Hayden takes his coffee in a to-go cup, then steps into the garage and then into his completely average car. The hospital should only be about twenty minutes away. That should be enough time for Hayden to get his head on straight.

Hayden has a vague inkling on what he's going to say as he parks in the visitor's lot and adjusts his hoodie before walking inside. The receptionist is very nice and the process of obtaining Shane's room number is exceptionally easy.

Hayden's looking at his phone, checking some Instagram DM requests because they're truly asinine, so he's not even paying attention when he collides with someone on the way to the elevator.

"Shit--" he says, quickly stepping back and glancing up at the person he ran into. His face falls instantly, schooling into a scowl as he glares. "What are you doing here, Rozanov?"

Rozanov doesn't look too pleased, expression impartial and unimpressed. He has his hands in his pockets, fists straining at the fabric. "Am I not allowed to see how Hollander is doing?"

Don't fucking say his name, Hayden wants to sneer, but knows that won't do anything. "I wasn't expecting you to be here."

"I am not as much of an asshole as you think I am, Pike."

Funny, Shane said the same thing about you.

"The hospital's only been open for an hour," Hayden points out in what he hopes is a perfectly pleasant and conversational tone to be having with the captain of his arch rival team. Hayden shrugs, tilts his head. "You must've wanted to be here real early."

"Thought I should at least come by and say sorry." Rozanov isn't giving Hayden the answer he wants. "Good sportsmanship."

When has Rozanov *ever* cared about good fucking sportsmanship? If they were on the ice, Hayden would spit in his face, and then throw down and take them both to the penalty box.

"What?" Hayden scoffs. Rozanov clenches his jaw. "Did you stop by to

make sure he was still in *good condition?"*

"What do you mean?" Rozanov says darkly.

"I know, okay. I know about what's happening, *Lily."*

Rozanov's expression betrays him for only a moment before he forces it into neutrality. His eyes, however, burn with a concealed rage. Hayden's not afraid of him. He's not like the rookies who don't want to risk the wrath of the Russian Brute. He's not like the coaches who warn Hayden to tread carefully when in deep water. He's not like Shane, who somehow found himself in Rozanov's bed, just another name on Rozanov's long roster.

What's Rozanov going to do? Fight him? Right here in the hospital?

"Who have you told?" is what Rozanov asks next.

"Who have I told?" Hayden echoes incredulously. "Nobody! Do you think people *want* to know about this! It's bad enough that it's fucking with the way you two play, I don't want it fucking with the way my *team* plays."

Rozanov says nothing.

"So *really* why are you here?" Hayden takes a shuddering breath, then folds his arms tightly. "It's not like you can fuck Shane into the mattress when he has a concussion and broken collarbone."

"Fractured," Rozanov corrects quietly. *Quietly.* Hayden blinks to make sure he heard him right. "And no. I wouldn't. Never. He's injured and... and he is out of it. He might say things that he doesn't mean."

"Why? What did he tell you?"

"He invited me to his cottage this summer."

"The cottage?" Hayden repeats. Shane's fucking cottage. Hayden's never been invited, and every time that Hayden even brought it up jokingly, Shane shut him down in an instant. The cottage is Shane's *oasis.* It's his break from the world, from the rink, from the cameras and the responsibilities of captain. Shane went there to be alone.

Entirely alone.

And he invited Ilya Fucking Rozanov.

"Goodbye, Pike," Rozanov pushes past him, checking his shoulder against Hayden's, before he disappears into the lobby and then out the front door.

Hayden watches him go, then turns back around with a scoff, taking the elevator up to Shane's room.

He knocks gently before pushing in.

Shane's eyes light up with hope, before he deflates into his bed.

As Hayden shuts the door behind him, he knows with a devastating certainty that the electric look in his best friend's eyes was not meant for him. Hayden's seen that look before, and he wore it at the altar. His best friend is in love. Shane Hollander is in love with Ilya Rozanov.

Fuck.

"Hey, man," Hayden greets lightly with a smile. "Don't look too sad to see me. How you doing?"

"Okay," Shane answers, voice airy from the medication. "Sorry, thought you were someone else."

"Someone else, huh?" Hayden heads over to the side of the bed, pulling up a chair. "Anyone in particular."

"No," Shane says, drawing out the vowel.

"Really? Not even, uh, *Lily?"*

The heart rate monitor beeps at Hayden's side. He raises an eyebrow. Shane has both hands over his red face.

"Maybe," Shane drawls bashfully.

"You really like Lily, huh?" Hayden pats at Shane's knee, and his friend peeks through his fingers to glance at Hayden.

"Hayd, I like him so much, you have *no idea."*

Him. Wow. Either it's the drugs or Shane's really just tired of hiding it for, what, eight years? Longer, probably. Maybe. Hayden doesn't want to think about that part of things.

"I heard through the grapevine that you invited Lily up to the cottage

with you."

"Yes!" Shane's hands flop down at his sides. "I'm so excited. Just the two of us. Nobody to bother us. No hockey or cameras or reporters. Just us. It's gonna be great."

"Is it, now?" Hayden can't fucking stop his smile, stupid and genuine as it forms on his face.

"He just has to say yes."

"He hasn't?"

"He said *maybe,* Hayden." Shane sticks his bottom lip out in a pout. "I think he's scared, but that's okay because I'm scared too. This is all really scary."

Hayden's heart lurches as his smile flickers. Shane doesn't seem to notice, but his eyes are unfocused at some spot above Hayden's head. "Why is it scary?" he asks in a small voice.

"If people know bad things could happen. To me, but mostly to him too." Shane's head lolls back against his pillow. His empty hand reaches out, and Hayden takes it, lacing their fingers together. Shane swings them gently against the sheets. "Which sucks, because I want to tell so many people about him. About us. Because he's so nice, but you would never know. He just, like, has ginger ale for me whenever I want it. He makes fun of me but like... in a not-mean way. Kind of like how you make fun of me sometimes." Though Hayden hates the comparison to Rozanov, he can't help the way his insides turn to mush at all of the sweet nothings Shane reminisces on. "He came to see me earlier. I think he was really scared."

"He didn't want to leave you," Hayden says. "The refs had to push him back to the bench."

"Did people see?"

"I think so," Hayden says honestly.

"Fuck," Shane breathes.

"But, y'know, I don't think many people are focusing on that." Hayden looks a way a bit sheepishly. "I may or may not have tried to break Marleau's jaw."

"Hayden."

"I know."

"Hayden!" Shane shakes their hands violently, and Hayden looks over to Shane, who happens to be smiling like an idiot. "You started a fight for me?"

"I've started fights for less, but yeah. I started a fight for you." Hayden shrugs. He's not exactly known for his cool temper amongst the NHL. Shane's always been the chill to Hayden's energetic fury. Aggression and calculation. The center and his wing. Captain and alternate. "And then we won. We should be going into the playoffs soon."

Shane frowns. "I won't be there. I'm sorry."

"Hey, it's fine, man. What matters is to take care of yourself. You took a bad hit." Hayden's eyes flick around the hospital room.

"Could've been worse."

"Could've been worse, but that doesn't mean it wasn't bad." Hayden runs his tongue over his teeth before looking back to Shane. "Hey, man. I know that you aren't really in the most sober of headspace right now, but I hope that you at least remember this." Shane's brow furrows, but he doesn't say anything, allowing Hayden to continue. "You're my best friend. I love you. I would do anything for you, and that includes *maybe* learning to like someone I don't like that much."

"What do you--"

"I know about Lily, and what you've told me here really only cements what I already thought I knew."

Shane's eyes are wide. "Hayden. It's not--"

"No, it is. It's okay. I know. You're okay. It's weird, but you're a weirdo, so I really should've expected something like this from you and him." Hayden laughs shaking his head. "I don't... I don't know how to feel about it yet, but it doesn't matter how I feel. It matters how you feel, right?"

Shane's eyes have turned shiny.

"You really like him, don't you?"

When Shane speaks, it's the most sober he's sounded the entire

conversation. "I think I love him, Hayden."

"Then don't let that get away."

"You mean it?"

"Of course I do," Hayden answers, voice tight. He clears his throat with a half-laugh. "You weirdo."

That causes Shane to laugh as well, though it sounds more of a sob than anything. "Thanks, Hayden."

"I love you, man."

Shane squeezes their hands tight. "I love you, too."

Chapter End Notes

considering chapter 4 :3 depends on what we get for the finale bc i might actually go insane with episode six,,, connor and hudson are going to kill me with their acting omg,,,,,,,,

also finished the game by the time of posting this and GOOD GOD was there an absurd amount of scraps or WHAT i swear the flyers and the hawks were throwing hands after every whistle and i am HERE FOR IT flyers ily flyers <33

also if anyone caught the quinn hughes reference in this chapter ily and PLEASE let me know

as always! if you enjoyed leave me a little comment! happy holidays to all who celebrate, and if you don't then have a fantastic wednesday!

Chapter 4: BONUS: Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> SURPRISE BONUS CHAPTER 4 !!!!!! finished this one up tonight while waiting for my laundry to be finished and LET ME TELL YOU GUYS I HAVE HAD A WEEK. this chapter got away from me,,,,, this little fic started as a 2k one shot and now it is (checks wc) 18 thousand words. wow. go me!! i love jackie and hayden and i am forever mad at rachel reid for making all of her female characters just girlboss yes women envoys to all of the yaoi,,, it bothers me so much,,,, WELL HERE I AM WITH SOME MORE OF THE PIKES BC I LOVE THEM!!! also developing hayden's backstory is really fun ＜3
>
> also: update on me and my girl,,, we did not kiss sadly

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's only been days since the season ended and the whole hockey world got their shit rocked by Scott Hunter coming out right after winning the Cup, and Hayden's about to go insane. He has two five year old daughters, a one year old son, and a newborn daughter that literally will not stop crying no matter what time of day it is. Hayden's practically on the verge of tears as he tries to shush Amber's sobs. Jackie, of course, is out on a well-deserved walk through their neighborhood with some friends. It's a gorgeous spring day, just on the cusp of summer, and Hayden would love to be with Jackie on the way to their little pond that they discovered off the greenbelt.

But Jackie needs the break far more than Hayden does. He can handle being a single dad for a few hours.

He bounces Arthur on his hip as he bustles around the kitchen, trying to make Ruby and Emma their sandwiches (with a perfect ratio of strawberry to raspberry jam to almond butter, cut into dinosaur shapes, of course) *and* wash up the blueberries that Arthur loves so much. He can't eat them without supervision yet. Too small. Amber, screaming and thrashing, lays in the crib that they set up in the living room, just to have access to their youngest daughter without having to run up and down the stairs to the nursery.

"It's okay, Berry," Hayden coos, trying to project some soothing emotion to her fit. "I'll have your milk ready soon." He checks over his shoulder to make sure that the bottle is being warmed properly. Arthur starts babbling, pulling on the front of Hayden's faded Metros tee he got his first year on the team. *"Ruby, Emma!"* he calls. "Lunch is ready!"

It only takes a second for the girls to come racing down the stairs, giggling and shoving each other as they race to get the *'favorite seat'* at the end of the island countertop.

"Shit--slow down, girls! You're going to get hurt." His heart stutters as Ruby jumps the last few steps, her bare feet smacking against the downstairs hardwood. His mind's eye has fun replaying the scene, but instead of Ruby landing the jump, she falls forward and smacks her head or breaks her nose and then there's blood everywhere and Hayden would have to take her to the emergency room. Hayden shakes away the image, then fixes his girls with a stern look. "Don't do that again."

"Sorry, daddy," Ruby says, looking like she actually means it, before she takes the 'favorite seat', much to Emma's disdain.

Luckily, the girls seem thrilled at the perfect specificity of the sandwiches and don't complain before they dive in. Hayden moves onto his next task, which is depositing Arthur into a safe area where he won't be at risk of toppling over and knocking his huge head onto something that could hurt him. Hayden situates his son in a chair with pillows on both sides of him, then changes the television to Paw Patrol instead of the *Continue Watching?* screen for the Mickey Mouse Clubhouse. Arthur makes a pleased noise, clapping his hands together.

Hayden then tends to Amber, his most perfect little blubbering Berry, plucking her out of her crib and swaddles of blankets. He does a quick sniff test, grimacing when he realizes that he's going to have to change her for what feels like the hundredth time today.

By the time that's all taken care of, Amber has luckily stopped crying, snoozing in Hayden's arms after she drank her bottle of milk. Emma and Ruby are asleep on the couch together, sharing a blanket. Arthur's still awake, but he's always been a quiet kid, pleasantly sitting in the chair with his hand in his mouth.

In the moment of peace, Hayden finally sits in the matching chair at Arthur's side. The credits to the Paw Patrol episode roll, and before

Hayden knows it, it's an hour later.

The front door opens, Hayden sleepily glancing up to Jackie as she enters. She has a purse slung over her shoulder and a handful of shopping bags in hand. The smile on her face warms every bone in Hayden's body.

"Hi," she mouths, noting their sleeping children.

"You have fun?" Hayden whispers.

Jackie smiles and nods, glowing in a way she hasn't for a while. She needed to get out, to go and see her friends and be her own adult without having to worry about a husband or kids. Now that it's finally the off season, Hayden hopes that she'll have more chances. He doesn't mind being a house husband four months out of the year, especially if it means that Jackie's getting the break that she deserves.

She drops her bags at the bench by the door and toes off her shoes before hustling over to gently drape her arms around Hayden's neck. She kisses the top of his head, then moves to kiss his cheek. Her hand gently runs over the wispy hairs on Amber's head.

"Do anything today?" she asks, voice just a quiet hum.

"Took care of the kids," Hayden responds with a bit of a shrug. "Found out the girls now like their milk in the white cups with *only* yellow straws."

"Oh really?"

"Yeah. Wouldn't drink it, and they just kept telling me I was wrong until I *somehow* managed to crack the code." He rolls his eyes, but the smile on his face is entirely fond. "So. Keep that in mind the next time they ask for milk."

"Will do." Jackie places a kiss to Hayden's lips, made awkward by the angle but Hayden wouldn't have it any other way. "I'm gonna go put my stuff away and then I'll be back down, okay?"

"Okay," Hayden nods, smiling like an idiot as she disappears up the stairs to their room. It only takes a moment longer before she's returned and makes grabby hands towards their sleeping newborn. Hayden happily hands her over, then flexes the wrist that fell asleep due to the prolonged odd angle he had been holding Amber at. Hayden finally stands after hours of being a human cradle.

After using the bathroom, he checks the time, and deems it an appropriate time to grab a beer. He steps onto the back patio so his daughters don't ask for a drink of *"dad's special juice"* and scrolls through his phone. Mostly, it's just highlights of the Admirals winning the cup and then the aftermath. Hayden has to stop to zoom in on the video of who Hunter's trying to eat the face of. It's literally just some guy. Does Shane know about this? Probably. Hell, who *doesn't* know about this?

Hayden also treats the comment section of the post as a free block list, having the time of his life forbidding any of the bigots raving about Hunter's sexuality from ever being able to interact with Hayden's page again.

Hayden has another swig of his beer, then stares into the sky. A handful of birds fly overhead in their perfect v-shape. How do they do that? Do they do it on purpose?

Is Hayden really at the point in life where he's considering taking up bird watching?

No. He's not that old yet. He's, what, twenty-six? That sounds vaguely correct. He's not keeping track of the years.

Needing to take his mind off of birds, Hayden pulls out his phone and calls Shane. It's been a while since he's actually talked with the guy, ever since he gave some lame excuse of retreating to his "cottage" for the summer. The very cottage that he invited Rozanov to.

Hayden's not jealous. He doesn't want any hand in Shane and Rozanov's fuckass relationship. He doesn't even want to *know*.

But it still kind of hurts that Shane didn't want to tell Hayden. Did he think Hayden would react poorly? Well, *yeah,* he would react poorly to Rozanov being involved in any sort of situation, but Hayden literally does not give four flying shits which way Shane swings. Hayden confidently swings in one direction, so why would he ever have a problem if Shane swings in the opposite? It just means that they never have to worry about fighting over the same girls... or guys. Not that Hayden thinks that Shane would *ever* make a move on Jackie, but like. That's the saying right? More women for Hayden?

What the fuck is he thinking.

Shane picks up.

"Hey! Hi, buddy!" Hayden greets before clearing his throat. He turns off his dad voice when he speaks next. "How have you been? Good retreat?"

"Hey, yeah I've been having fun." Shane also clears his throat. "And you? How's the baby? It's, uh, Amber, right?"

"Amber, yeah!" Hayden beams. "She's great. She's been crying a lot, but y'know, that's just how three week old babies are." There was also a lot of crying in the delivery room. Jackie almost had the nurses kick Hayden out because of how much he was sobbing over the miracle of life. It's not like he could help it! He was already emotional over the fact that they lost the playoffs and his best friend was hurt and his best friend was also fraternizing in intimate ways with the enemy and also he was thrilled to be having a fourth child and preemptively mourning all the sleep he'd be losing over her.

"I don't," Shane says flatly, then there's rustling on the other end of the line. "But, uh, glad to know that she's healthy. And--*fuck*--Jackie?"

Hayden pauses, then moves the phone away from his ear to arch a brow at Shane's contact screen. After a long moment, he hesitantly returns the phone to his ear, brow furrowed as a series of slightly moist noises filter in from Shane's background. "Yeah, uh, she's good. Great. Recovering very well."

"Good to hear--"

Why does Shane sound like he's had every breath punched right out of his body? Did he just get back from a run? No. No, because he wasn't out of breath earlier. Either he went on a run in the span of thirty seconds or...

Wait a god damn fucking minute.

"You still enjoying your solitude?" Hayden asks conversationally, then downs the rest of his beer. He casts a glance inside to where Jackie's in the rocking chair, cooing softly to Amber while the girls, now awake, play with their letters on the floor.

And of fucking course, Emma is stacking the I with the L and Y. Ruby has the A and she's using it to spell CAT.

Fuck Hayden's life.

Shane takes a shuddering breath. Is he really getting off on this?

"Yeah, no, it's *great."*

Because Hayden has at least some fucking decorum, he does not ask Shane if he's in the middle of receiving a blow job. He does not ask if Rozanov's mouth feels like heaven on his dick or if Shane's fingers are tangled up in Rozanov's hair. He doesn't ask if they're in bed or on the couch or in a hammock outside on this beautiful day. He doesn't ask if it's everything Shane could've wanted *and more.*

Because Hayden doesn't need to fucking know, and his brain doesn't need to be conjuring up those images.

"Okay, weirdo. Have fun at your cottage. Call me if you ever want to play Chel, or y'know, just hang out. I miss you man."

"Yeah, uh, love you."

"I love you too."

There's a choked sound on the other side of the line, and Hayden's face goes red. Hayden doesn't think Shane's ever hung up faster. Hayden stares for a long time at his phone, and only when the screen goes dark from inactivity does he set it down on the glass outdoor table. When he glances down, he swears, then conjures up the most un-horny scenarios imaginable to get his hard-on soft.

Why the *hell* is he hard?

If Hayden's anything, it's a monogamous, straight man who is desperately in love with his wife. Hayden would pull down the stars one-by-one if she said they were bothering her. He would rip each and every one of his remaining teeth loose if it meant she would smile. He would sire all the kids in the world if she wanted more. Hayden would do fucking *anything* for Jackie.

And the fact that his fucking body betrayed him, even for a moment, is horribly humiliating.

She doesn't have to know, but Hayden will tell her. He'll tell her anything.

After a cold shower at 4 PM on a Wednesday evening.

"How's Shane?" Jackie asks as Hayden nudges himself back inside after a handful of minutes. She's still in the rocking chair, but now Arthur has joined her.

"Good," Hayden answers shortly. Jackie raises her brows. "Just recovering at the cottage." He jabs a thumb towards the stairs. "I'm gonna take a shower real quick. Need anything when I come down?"

Jackie tilts her head, clocking something but mercifully not commenting. Hayden will bring it all up tonight when all of the kids are asleep and Hayden's safe to freak out in the safety of their bedroom.

Hayden clambers up the stairs and ducks into the en-suite bathroom, not even bothering to grab a change of clothes. The water roars much louder than the blood in his ears.

Hayden's a man, and like all men, he enjoys three hour long showers and to sit on the toilet for at least forty-five minutes on his phone every morning. His bathroom breaks are bathroom hours. He spends a good half of the time either fucking around on his phone, staring aimlessly at the wall, and seeing how far he can turn up the water in the shower before it becomes too grueling and he pretty much falls out of the shower trying to dance around the boiling steaming streams of red-hot destruction of Hayden's own making. The other half of the time is when he cranks the shower all the way to the other side of the spectrum and tries to do something about taming his ruthless sex drive.

Really, the cold does nothing, which is just the right amount of properly infuriating to set each and every one of Hayden's nerves on fire. If he ends up beating his dick thinking of all the times Shane's probably had his mind blown from all the sucking and fucking, then that's Hayden's business and Hayden's business only.

As he sits for a moment in the afterglow, allowing the freezing water to slowly return him back to his body, the realization hits Hayden like a fucking firehose.

Shit.

Fuck.

Fuck, fuck, fuck--

He just got off to imagining his best friend get fucked by his massive boyfriend.

Panic seizes his body as he shuts the water off and nearly trips over himself as he stumbles out of the shower. The foggy reflection in the

mirror above the double sink stares back at him, but Hayden's looking clear as day at his flushed body and soft dick. Jackie's countless products lay scattered across the counter.

Hayden wants to throw up.

He dries off a little faster than normal.

He also changes into his most comfiest clothes because he needs at least one small comfort before he confesses to his wife the fact that he *just* got off to the thought of his best friend being fucked or blown or *whatever* by not *only* another man, but Ilya Rozanov.

It's going to be a long night. Hayden's already planning which blanket he's going to take with him to the couch.

Jackie most certainly notices Hayden's odd behavior as soon as his socked feet touch back down on the first level. She's still in the spot Hayden left her, but now Arthur's sat down by his older sisters to play school. Hell, if they keep it up, they might be able to help Arthur skip a grade and then become the first toddler to ever cure a deadly disease or something like that. If anyone can do the impossible, it would certainly be Hayden's four children. He's sure they're going to take over the world one day. It's not a matter of if, but rather when.

Since it's just barely past five, Hayden turns his back to the living room and starts the process of making dinner. Pork chops and macaroni and cheese. That should be good enough for everyone? Simple enough for Hayden not to colossally fuck it up, and it's also one of Jackie's few simple pleasures. He knows that Emma doesn't really like the way Hayden makes the noodles *"spicy"*, so he's sure to divide his seasonings into two separate batches while the water boils.

As he half-focuses on seasoning the pork chops, he sends an occasional glance over his shoulder to where Jackie rests with Amber in her arms. From the commotion above, Hayden takes it as his daughters went upstairs to play animals in their room. Jackie catches his eye for a moment, and Hayden has never looked away faster.

He finishes cooking dinner without looking back into the living room, just listening to the sounds of the first inning of the Toronto and Chicago baseball game. Hayden played baseball briefly as a kid, but gave it up when he realized he would just be idly standing in the outfield for a majority of the game. Jackie, however, had played softball all the way until college. She was damn good at it too, only stopping when she realized she was pregnant with twins and without

Hayden home most of the year, she would have to be the present parent.

Hayden feels sick for thinking about it.

He plates Jackie up some food, and then even fixes up some of the cheese splashes with a napkin to make it look extra nice. Does he also allow Jackie the *good spoon* because while it may be Hayden's favorite, it is also Jackie's favorite? Absolutely.

When he approaches her in the living room and hands her a plate with the *good spoon,* she furrows her brow. Yeah. She definitely knows that something is up.

"I have something I really need to tell you," Hayden blurts after just a measly moment of silence. "Not now, but uh, tonight. Please."

"Are you okay?" she asks, concern lacing through her voice.

"No. I mean, yes. Physically yes." He was feeling *great* when he was standing in the cold shower feeling entirely boneless. "I just wanted to warn you, because. Um."

"Are you trying to divorce me?" Jackie asks flatly.

"No!" Hayden practically screams. His eyes are wide, tears forming at the *thought* of him *ever* being the one to leave Jackie. If *anything,* she would be the one to leave him after all of this. He would probably deserve it. "Never. I love you more than *anything* on this fucking planet--"

"Jar."

"Jackie--" Hayden pleads, and now that his moment of panic has passed, he can tell clear as day that she had been messing with him. Rude. "I'm serious. I'm really, *really* serious. I'll tell you after dinner when the kids are all put in bed, I just--" he cuts himself short, not exactly sure of where he could be going with that statement.

She seems to soften a bit, nodding after a moment of deliberation. "Okay. Don't let it tear you up." *Too late.*

The kids, luckily, don't seem to pick up on Hayden's odd behavior as they sit around the dinner table. Amber's asleep in her crib, dozing blissfully after being fed a warm evening bottle of milk. Arthur's in his purple high-chair, pushing cheerios and blueberries around the little

tray table before shoving them right into his sticky mouth. Ruby and Emma are speaking in one of their made-up languages that Hayden is semi-fluent in at *best.* He tried to learn it the other day, but the girls got mad when he was confusing his *bleurgh* pronunciation with a *blourgh* pronunciation. Oh well. Not everyone can be a polyglot.

Hayden barely has a handle on French. Jackie, however, is fluent, and has aspirations for the kids to follow in her footsteps.

Look at her. The most gorgeous, stunning role model on the planet. Hayden would marry her again right now if he could. He would marry her twice, three times, and then a fourth just for fun, and then he would kiss her long and hard and then take her to bed where he could hear all of her giggles and moans. He wants to wake up next to her every day. He wants to hold her hair while the morning sickness causes her to vomit into the toilet for hours. He wants to clap for the fashion shows of all her newly bought clothes. He wants to go on runs by her side, buy her favorite smoothies and mocktails, watch the sunrise.

Hayden was only nineteen when he met Jackie, and he knew after their first conversation at that charity athlete event. A mutual friend had introduced them. Hayden can't even remember his name. It's not important. *Nothing* is as important as Jackie.

When dinner is finished, Hayden takes the initiative to gather all of the plates and begin cleaning. Jackie has the girls go upstairs while she lingers behind to grab Arthur from his high-chair. She says something to Hayden about it being bath time for all of them and heads upstairs. It gives Hayden a few moments to himself. Well, a few moment to himself and his sleeping newborn in the crib in the living room, but she's not a full person yet. She doesn't understands the anguish that Hayden is currently living through.

Hayden finishes the dishes, then moves to wiping down the countertops, then straightens the dining room so all of the chairs have been properly pushed in and all of the table mats are in their place. He wonders if he should sweep, maybe take a long moment to consider mopping the floors or finally getting to cleaning the baseboards like he's meant to for the past month or so, but then he would be fully procrastinating and he should just take this fucking situation like a fucking man and grab it by the ballsack and go head-first into the danger.

It's not like Jackie would kill him, right?

But she might file for divorce, and that's worse than any sort of knife that she could plunge into his heart.

He stops by the crib to gently pull Amber into his arms, then shuts off all the lights before making his way up the stairs.

The bathroom door is open, but still steamy, so bath time must've gotten over just a few moments ago. He follows the sound of Jackie's soft coos to the girls' room, where Hayden hired a mural painter to turn one of the walls into a whimsical little jungle with about a hundred animals hidden amongst the foliage. In their matching twin beds, Emma and Ruby watch their mother with wide eyes. Arthur, half asleep, is cradled in Jackie's arms. She has a storybook in hand, one that Hayden recognizes as the girls' favorite. It's about a mouse, and how after he got a cookie he turned into some demanding tyrant. Hayden leans against the door frame, happy to watch his wife read the tale with such expressive voices for each new character introduced. The lamp sitting on the end table between the beds casts a warm glow over his little family.

Just to think, seven years ago he was a bullheaded, cocky rookie who after just one measly year on the fourth line was traded from Tampa Bay to Montreal, a once-great franchise that had lost its steam. He was a nobody, though he thought he could be somebody, and he wasn't sure if it was his arrogance, tenacity, or the fact that he met Shane Hollander, the wonderboy that Montreal was ecstatic to get their claws on, but something clicked. He had always been good at hockey, but his sophomore season was when he got *good.* It got him from the third line to the first in just a matter of months. It got him to be at Shane Fucking Hollander's wing, and Hayden hasn't left.

Hayden still thinks he's a boy. But when Jackie stands to give their girls a kiss on the forehead and shelve the little storybook, he hopes that he can be the man that his family requires.

He's messed up many times.

Maybe tonight he can make something right.

"Good night, girls," Hayden says gently as he shuffles past Jackie to kiss them goodnight. "If you need anything, mommy and daddy are just down the hall." They giggle sleepily and Hayden swears his heart is about to burst from his chest as he exits the warm room.

He finds Jackie a door down in Arthur's room, singing some soft lullaby that has their son drifting off to dream land.

He joins her at the edge of the bed, slotting his side against hers, as Arthur takes his final yawn and smacks his toddler lips. Hayden misses the days sleeping was that simple.

"Bedtime?" Jackie asks softly as she stands, running a hand up Hayden's bicep. *That* does a couple of things to his brain, but he isn't going to touch on that now. He needs to be levelheaded entirely. He needs to be entirely in control of his thoughts tonight.

Hayden just nods and follows her to Amber's room where, together, they set up the baby monitors and swaddle her up for bed. When all four kids are accounted for, it's now time for Hayden to face the music as he offers a hand to Jackie and leads her into their bedroom. He shuts the door softly, staring at the little knots in their wooden floor.

"Hayden," she says gently, tugging him towards the bed. He sits at the edge of it, and so does Jackie, but she leaves a few inches between their thighs. The only parts of them touching are their hands. Hayden isn't sure if he wants to swallow her whole or push her away entirely. "Baby, you gotta talk to me."

"I'm sorry," is the first thing out of his stupid mouth. *"Fuck,"* he grumbles, pushing his free hand into his eye. They sting, but the dull ache of his palm at least is enough to distract from the humiliation of tears. "Jack, I'm so fucking sorry-"

"Hayden. You *have* to give me some context here." Her soft touch comes up to his cheek, bringing his blurry gaze to her. "I don't know what's happening."

"I think I cheated on you."

Jackie blinks. Her shoulders straighten. Her grip on their conjoined hands loosen and Hayden wants to tear his rib cage right open and give Jackie his heart as to say *here, it's yours. It's always going to be yours.*

"Hayden." she says shortly. Firmly. "You need to explain yourself. Now."

It's not uncommon for athletes to cheat on their wives while they're away. It happens all the fucking time and Hayden's heard far too many stories from the vets in the locker room. They always *laugh* and then flick each other with towels as if it's a fucking game and not a whole woman's life they're ruining by being so unfaithful. It's the same men that go about calling their children nightmares, the same men

who laugh when people cry, the same men who don't have an ounce of dignity in their fucking spines. Hayden had always nodded and faked a smile and moved on, for he never wanted the vets to aim their chirps at *him.* Hayden's not exactly known for his cool temper, and if he became the target of any shots fired at *his* family, then there would be blood.

"Earlier today," Hayden starts after taking a long breath. He wants to squeeze Jackie's hand for support, but doesn't know if she'd enjoy that. "Um, I went out back and um," he pauses, knowing that he'll only be able to function in short sentences. "I called Shane, because he's my *friend* and uh--" *I love him,* is what's on his tongue, but Hayden doesn't exactly think that wording would help his situation. "It was normal for a few seconds, but then I think that he was, uh--" when he pauses this time, it's half from humiliation. "In the middle of something."

Jackie raises one brow, but her stern expression doesn't change. When Hayden's quiet for a moment too long, she nods for him to continue.

"I think Rozanov was like... blowing him." He buries his red face in his free hand, covering his eyes and his shame. "And it kind of turned me on." A beat. "And then I jacked off to it in the shower."

Jackie says nothing.

"That's it," Hayden finishes. Unable to open his eyes and unable to move his hand from his face. "I don't know what came over me, and I don't know what I deserve, I just--"

"Hayden."

He peeks through his fingers. Jackie's jaw is set, but she doesn't look mad. Hayden's only seen her *mad* mad once before, and that was when some asshole cut them off on a summer trip to Nova Scotia and nearly killed them all. She doesn't look like that now.

"Yeah?" he practically whimpers.

"Did you instigate anything?"

"No? I was just calling Shane and it just... happened."

"Did you know it was happening."

"Not at first, but then it clicked."

"How long did it take you to hang up after that?"

"Shane hung up like... two minutes later."

"Two minutes?" Jackie's eyebrows shoot up, her mouth dropping open. Hayden fears that he may have made a devestating mistake. He should've hung up as soon as possible. He should've probably yelled at Shane and called him and his stupid Russian hookup? Boyfriend? *Lover?* fucking perverts for having intercourse while Hayden was right there on the other side of the line. And then Hayden should've gone right over to the cottage and broken some of Rozanov's ribs with a hockey stick and then left before things could get too awkward or Hayden could figure out why he was so fucking attracted to the thought of his best friend being bent in half by Ilya Motherfucking Rozanov.

"Yeah," Hayden whimpers again after his brain catches up.

"Rozanov made Shane come in two minutes?"

Hayden blinks, then retracts the time line. "Yeah. More or less. Probably on the side of less."

"Holy shit," Jackie mutters incredulously. Hayden isn't sure how to respond. "Two minutes? That's actually fucking insane."

Hayden blinks again. "As in?"

"The rumors about Rozanov being a sex god were annoying, but now that they might be true?" Jackie slaps the bed with her free hand. "That's annoying."

Hayden finds himself laughing, for the terrifying tension between them has been softened. "He's so fucking annoying, Jackie, oh my *god.* I thought playing on the ice with him was bad enough, but now that we might have to be around him often is, like, torture or something. It has to be torture, right?"

"If he ever shows up, we can just... oh, what's it called?" She snaps once. "Oh, Irish Goodbye."

Hayden beams, but then it softens as the heavy weight returns between his ribs. "In all seriousness though, I am so sorry. I don't... I don't know what came over me and I hope you're not mad, but I one *hundred* percent understand if you are, and if you want me to sleep on the couch for a while, I can--"

"Hayden. I don't think you cheated on me." Jackie squeezes his hand and the pressure is just enough to break the bubble in his chest. "Was this jarring to hear? *Yes.* Is it not really what I *wanted* to hear? Also yes. But, like," she sighs, shaking her head. "You didn't initiate anything." She purses her lips as she thinks, a little crease forming between her brows. Hayden wants to kiss it. "Hayden, are you attracted to Shane?"

The question hits him firmly in the middle of his chest. *No*-- the answer is forming on his lips before he bites it back. "I don't want Shane," Hayden says instead. "I don't want him, Jackie, I don't. He's neurotic and weird and flakey and all he *ever* thinks about is hockey." Hayden draws his bottom lip between his teeth, worrying it for a moment. "He's my best friend, yeah, but I could never date him. I couldn't and I wouldn't. I don't want Shane."

"Hayden." Jackie redirects his eyes to look into hers. Hayden wants to throw up again. "Are you attracted to Shane?"

Knowing there's no escape, Hayden sighs and takes his stupid heart by the ballsack and fully sends. "I think so."

"Sexually?"

"I think so."

"Are you gay, Hayden?"

"No."

"Bisexual?"

He opens his mouth. Then closes it.

Because back in Tampa Bay, there was a veteran ten years Hayden's senior. He was missing a canine and had the most intense eyes Hayden had ever seen. He was mean and he was violent on the ice. He led the whole League in penalty minutes, and there had always been a voice in the back of Hayden's mind that wanted to be the victim of a cruel hit by the veteran enforcer. Hayden didn't want the man to hold him gingerly or kiss his bruises better. He didn't want to wake up with the man or get smoothies in the early hours of the morning with him at his side.

Hayden hasn't thought about him in years. He hasn't had a reason to.

Last he heard, the enforcer retired from LA.

"I don't want to date a man," Hayden decides on. "I've never wanted to. They're too... too *manly*. I don't want to date anyone manly."

"Would you fuck a man?"

"No." Hayden answers surely. "I wouldn't. I don't want to fuck a man, I want to fuck you."

Something playfully satisfied crosses through Jackie's eyes, but she doesn't dwell on it. "If we weren't married, Hayden, would you fuck a man?"

He swallows, spinning the locker room fantasy that eighteen-year-old Hayden had dreamed of in the back of his mind. "I think so. I wanted to, I think. Before I met you."

"So bisexual?" Jackie repeats.

Hayden shakes his head. "I don't know. I don't want to think about it. I won't act on any of this anyways. It's not important at all, because I have *you,* Jack. Ever since I met you, all I've ever wanted was you. Not Shane, not Rozanov, not any of the other fucking guys in the locker room. I want *you."*

He holds her hands tightly in his, sure to keep her eyes locked with his. He can feel the back of his throat go scratchy and the space behind his eyes begin to sting. "Please believe me when I tell you that you're my one and only. Always."

The corner of her lip ticks up, her soft eyes somehow growing softer. "Okay. I believe you."

"I'm sorry," he says again as he pulls Jackie right into his arms, burying his face in the side of her neck and breathing in her scent. He would hollow out his whole body and let her crawl in if she were cold. He would shave off all his hair if she wanted a wig of it. He would give up hockey if she asked. He would sell his two cups and countless medals if they needed the money for anything her heart desired. She would never ask him of that, but Hayden would do so anyways.

"I love you," he mutters into her hair, stroking it softly.

"I know, Hayden," she whispers in return. "I love you, too."

They sit like that for a long time, tangled together at the edge of their bed. They're only pulled apart by the fussing of Amber, to which Hayden stands to take care of. When he returns, Jackie's turned down their bed and changed into her pajamas, which are just Hayden's. She looks so wonderfully domestic in Hayden's plaid pants, both the waist and the cuffs rolled a few times. An old Metros t-shirt almost reaches her knees.

Hayden wastes no time at all changing into a matching set and sliding into his side of the bed.

Jackie shuts off the lights and joins him, notching herself just right at Hayden's side. She's warm and soft in all the right places, perfect in the way that Hayden could never be. He's built hard and strong, meant to take and give hits careening down slick ice. He's in a profession where he can't quite afford to be soft, lest it gather the ridicule of the more traditional guys in the room.

But at home, he can tuck his head under Jackie's chin and she'll wrap her arms around his shoulders and pull him in. He can wake early in the mornings to make his family breakfast and coffee and he gets to sit on the floor with his brilliant daughters as they invent and rearrange words into things entirely new.

Curled against Jackie in the warmth of their bed, Hayden still feels a bit like a boy, but that's alright. He still has the rest of his life to become a man.

Chapter End Notes

> i'm still so mad at the ducks you guys,,, if you are an anaheim ducks fan gtfo of my space before i hit you with hammers. you guys killed my princess,,,,, jamie,,, jamie drysdale pelase be okay princess,,,, PLEASEEEEEE i need my emotional support hockey player,,,,, IN GOOD NEWS!!!! my other princess will smith hockey is back on the ice so he's getting better <3 why must both of my princesses be attacked like this though i do not like this one bit,,,

thank you all so much for reading and commenting!!! as always, i hope you enjoyed and if you did please consider leaving me a little comment <3

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